

DAR ES SALAAM SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM



CLASS: BASIC TECHNICIAN CERTIFICATE

COURSE: JOURNALISM ETHICS

CODE: JST 04110

SUB-ENABLING OUTCOME

Learner should be able to explain ethical requirements for journalists in news gathering and reporting.

- **MEANING OF ETHICS**

Ethics are moral principles and standards that guide human behavior on what is right and wrong.

- **JOURNALISM ETHICS**

Journalism ethics refers to the professional moral principles and rules that guide journalists in gathering, processing, and publishing news responsibly, truthfully, and fairly for the public interest.

- **IN RELATION TO JOURNALISM, ETHICS MEANS**

- i. Acting with honesty and integrity**

In journalism, acting with honesty and integrity means that a journalist must be truthful in all professional activities. The journalist should not lie, fabricate stories, or manipulate information. Integrity requires the journalist to remain morally upright even when facing pressure from politicians, employers, advertisers, or powerful individuals.

A journalist with integrity

- Does not accept bribes or gifts to change a story
- Does not publish false or misleading information
- Does not hide important facts from the public

Honesty and integrity ensure that journalism remains a trustworthy profession and that the public can rely on the information provided.

- ii. Respecting truth, accuracy, and objectivity**

This means that a journalist must always aim to report the truth as it actually happened. Accuracy requires careful checking of facts such as names, dates, figures, and places before publication. Objectivity means reporting without personal feelings, political views, or prejudice influencing the story.

A journalist should

- Verify information from reliable and multiple sources
- Avoid exaggeration and distortion of facts
- Separate facts from opinions
- Present balanced views from different sides of an issue

By respecting truth, accuracy, and objectivity, journalists help the public to understand reality correctly and make informed decisions.

iii. Respecting human dignity, privacy, and rights

Journalism ethics requires respect for every person's worth and humanity. A journalist should not humiliate, insult, or degrade individuals in the media. Respecting privacy means not intruding into people's private lives unless there is a strong public interest.

This includes

- Avoiding publication of private information such as medical conditions, family issues, or personal problems
- Protecting vulnerable groups such as children, victims of violence, and the disabled
- Avoiding discriminatory or hateful language based on race, gender, religion, or tribe

Respect for human dignity and rights ensures that journalism does not harm individuals or violate their freedoms.

iv. Avoiding harm, bias, and corruption

Ethical journalism requires journalists to minimize harm in their work. They should avoid publishing content that may cause unnecessary suffering, hatred, panic, or violence. Avoiding bias means not favoring one side unfairly or letting personal beliefs influence reporting.

Corruption in journalism includes

- Taking bribes to suppress or promote stories
- Blackmailing people for money
- Publishing propaganda for personal benefit

Journalists should:

- Use neutral and fair language
- Avoid sensational headlines
- Avoid hate speech and incitement
- Refuse gifts or payments that influence reporting

Avoiding harm, bias, and corruption protects society and preserves the credibility of the media.

v. Serving the public interest rather than personal gain

Journalism exists to serve society, not the journalist's personal interests. Serving the public interest means providing information that helps people understand issues that affect their lives, such as governance, health, education, security, and the economy.

This requires journalists to

- Put society's welfare above profit or fame
- Report on issues that expose wrongdoing and injustice
- Avoid using journalism to seek money, favors, or popularity
- Avoid publishing stories only to entertain or mislead without social value

When journalists serve the public interest, they contribute to democracy, accountability, and social development.

Example:

A journalist must not accept bribes to change a story because it violates ethical principles of honesty and independence.

- **THE MAIN ETHICAL PRINCIPLES OF JOURNALISM INCLUDE**

1. Truth and Accuracy

Truth and accuracy are the foundation of journalism. Journalists are required to report facts exactly as they occurred without distortion or exaggeration. This means that all information such as names, figures, dates, places, and statements must be carefully checked before publication. Journalists should never rely on rumors, assumptions, or unverified claims when writing or broadcasting news.

To ensure truth and accuracy, journalists must:

a. Cross-check information from different reliable sources

Cross-checking means comparing the same information from more than one independent and trustworthy source before publishing it. A journalist should not depend on a single source, especially when the information is sensitive or controversial. Using multiple sources helps to confirm whether the facts are consistent and reduces the risk of error, bias, or deliberate lies.

Journalists should:

- Interview more than one witness
- Compare statements from different sources
- Verify claims using documents or expert opinions

Cross-checking strengthens the credibility of a news story and prevents the spread of false or incomplete information.

b. Use official records and credible witnesses

Journalists should rely on official and authoritative records such as police reports, court documents, government statements, medical records, or verified statistics when reporting facts. Credible witnesses are people who have direct knowledge of an event and are reliable, such as professionals, officials, or individuals who were present at the scene.

This requires journalists to:

- Consult official documents and public records
- Interview qualified experts or responsible authorities
- Choose sources who are knowledgeable and trustworthy

Using official records and credible witnesses improves the accuracy and reliability of news reports.

c. Avoid spreading fake news, propaganda, or misleading information

Fake news refers to false or fabricated stories presented as real news. Propaganda is information deliberately designed to influence opinions rather than inform. Misleading information is content that is partly true but presented in a way that creates a false impression.

Journalists must:

- Reject unverified social media content
- Avoid publishing rumors and hearsay
- Avoid exaggerating or distorting facts
- Be careful with headlines that may misrepresent the story

By avoiding fake news, propaganda, and misleading information, journalists protect the public from deception and confusion.

Importance of practicing truth and accuracy

By practicing truth and accuracy, journalists help the public to:

- Receive correct and reliable information
- Understand events clearly
- Make informed decisions about social, political, and economic issues
- Develop trust in the media

Truthful and accurate reporting strengthens democracy and promotes responsible citizenship.

Example

A journalist confirms information from more than one reliable source before broadcasting a news story to ensure that the reported facts are correct and not based on rumors or assumptions.

2. Objectivity and Fairness

Objectivity and fairness require journalists to remain neutral and impartial in their reporting. A journalist should not allow personal beliefs, emotions, political views, or religious opinions to influence how news is reported. Fairness means giving all parties involved in a story an equal opportunity to present their views.

Journalists should

a. Avoid using biased or emotional language

Journalists must use neutral and professional language when reporting news. Biased language shows preference for one side of an issue, while emotional language is meant to provoke feelings such as anger, sympathy, or hatred instead of informing the audience. Using such language can influence how the public interprets a story and may distort the truth.

Journalists should:

- Avoid words that show judgment or opinion (e.g., “evil,” “heroic,” “disastrous”)
- Avoid exaggeration and sensational expressions
- Use factual and descriptive terms instead of emotional ones

This helps the audience to understand events without being emotionally or politically manipulated.

b. Present all relevant sides of a story

Objectivity requires that a journalist give every major party involved in a story an opportunity to express their views. Reporting only one side creates an incomplete and unfair story. Balanced reporting allows the audience to hear different perspectives and form their own opinions.

Journalists should:

- Interview all key parties in a dispute or controversy
- Include responses from both the accuser and the accused
- Provide context and background information

Presenting all sides promotes fairness and reduces accusations of bias.

c. Separate facts from opinions

Facts are statements that can be verified, such as dates, numbers, and direct quotations. Opinions are personal views or judgments. In ethical journalism, news reports should contain only facts, while opinions should be reserved for editorials, commentaries, or columns.

Journalists must:

- Clearly distinguish between what happened (facts) and what people think about it (opinions)
- Avoid inserting personal beliefs into news stories
- Use attribution when reporting opinions (e.g., “according to the minister...”)

Separating facts from opinions protects the integrity of news reporting.

d. Avoid favoritism and discrimination

Journalists should not favor certain individuals, political parties, ethnic groups, religions, or social classes in their reporting. Discrimination occurs when a journalist treats people unfairly because of their background or identity. Favoritism and discrimination damage the credibility of the media and promote social division.

Journalists should:

- Treat all subjects equally and respectfully
- Avoid stereotypes and prejudiced descriptions
- Ensure fair representation of different groups in society

Avoiding favoritism and discrimination promotes justice and equality in media coverage.

Importance of objectivity and fairness

Objectivity and fairness ensure that news reporting is balanced, credible, and trustworthy. When journalists are objective and fair:

- The public receives accurate and complete information
- Audiences are not misled or manipulated
- Media institutions maintain their professional reputation
- Democracy is strengthened through informed citizens

Example

In a political story, the journalist allows both the government and the opposition to express their views so that the audience can hear different perspectives and make an independent judgment.

3. Independence

Independence means that journalists must work free from outside control or influence, especially from political leaders, business owners, advertisers, or personal relationships. A journalist should not write or broadcast news that favors individuals or organizations because of money, gifts, or personal interests. Conflicts of interest must be avoided at all times.

Journalists must

a. Refuse bribes, gifts, and favors

Journalistic independence requires that reporters do not accept money, gifts, or special favors in exchange for positive coverage or for hiding negative information. Accepting such benefits creates a conflict of interest and can lead to biased or dishonest reporting. Even small gifts can influence a journalist's judgment and damage public trust.

Journalists should:

- Reject cash payments and expensive gifts from sources
- Avoid being influenced by advertisers or sponsors
- Report stories based on facts, not financial benefits

Refusing bribes and gifts helps maintain honesty and integrity in journalism.

b. Avoid reporting on issues where they have personal involvement

A journalist should not cover stories in which they have personal, family, business, or political interests. Personal involvement may affect objectivity and lead to biased reporting. For example, a journalist should not report on a company they own shares in or on a political party they support.

Journalists must:

- Declare conflicts of interest
- Withdraw from reporting on stories where neutrality is compromised
- Allow another journalist to cover such stories

Avoiding personal involvement ensures fair and impartial reporting.

c. Avoid being used as tools for propaganda

Propaganda is information designed to promote a political, ideological, or commercial agenda rather than inform the public truthfully. Journalists must avoid allowing powerful individuals, governments, or organizations to use the media as a platform for misleading or manipulative messages.

Journalists should:

- Question official statements instead of publishing them blindly
- Investigate claims before reporting them
- Distinguish between public information and promotional content
- Avoid publishing sponsored content as news

By resisting propaganda, journalists protect the public from manipulation and misinformation.

Importance of independence in journalism

Independence protects journalism from becoming corrupt and ensures credibility. When journalists are independent:

- News is based on truth, not on money or pressure
- The media can hold leaders accountable
- The public can trust the information they receive
- Journalism serves society rather than special interests

Example

A journalist does not advertise or praise a company in a news report simply because the company paid money. Instead, the journalist reports fairly and honestly based on verified facts.

4. Responsibility and Accountability

Responsibility and accountability mean that journalists are answerable for what they publish or broadcast. They must accept responsibility for the consequences of their work. When a mistake is made, a journalist should correct it openly and promptly instead of hiding it.

Journalists should:

a. Be careful and professional when reporting

Responsibility means that journalists must approach their work with diligence, caution, and professionalism. Every step—from gathering information to writing and broadcasting—requires careful attention to avoid mistakes, misunderstandings, or harm. Professionalism involves following established journalistic practices, maintaining high standards, and respecting the rights of sources and the audience.

Journalists should:

- Verify facts before publishing
- Use credible and reliable sources
- Avoid rushing stories that may lead to errors
- Maintain objectivity, fairness, and honesty

Being careful and professional reduces errors and increases the credibility of the media.

b. Accept criticism from the public

Accountability requires journalists to recognize that they serve the public and must listen to feedback. Constructive criticism from readers, viewers, or listeners helps journalists improve their work and correct weaknesses. Ignoring feedback can lead to repeated errors and loss of public trust.

Journalists should:

- Respond politely to complaints or concerns
- Investigate legitimate grievances regarding news coverage
- Use criticism to improve reporting standards

Accepting criticism demonstrates that the media values the audience and their right to accurate information.

c. Publish corrections or apologies when errors occur

No journalist is infallible, and mistakes may occur despite careful reporting. Ethical responsibility requires prompt acknowledgment and correction of errors to maintain credibility. Corrections or apologies inform the public that the media is committed to honesty and transparency.

Journalists should:

- Clearly state what was incorrect
- Correct errors promptly in the same platform where the original story appeared
- Apologize when misinformation causes harm

This practice strengthens public trust in the media.

Example:

If false information is broadcast, the journalist or media house issues a public correction or apology, clarifying the correct facts.

d. Follow professional standards and ethical codes

Journalists must adhere to professional codes of conduct and ethical guidelines set by media organizations, press councils, or regulatory authorities. These standards guide how journalists report news, treat sources, protect confidentiality, and avoid conflicts of interest.

Journalists should:

- Follow media house editorial policies
- Abide by national media laws and ethical frameworks
- Uphold international journalism standards (e.g., avoiding bias, defamation, and plagiarism)

Following professional standards ensures that journalism remains a responsible and respected profession.

Importance of responsibility and accountability

Responsibility and accountability ensure **transparency, credibility, and public trust**. When journalists take responsibility for their reporting:

- The public can rely on the media for truthful and accurate information
- Mistakes are corrected promptly, preventing misinformation
- Media organizations maintain their reputation and legitimacy
- Democracy and informed citizenship are supported

5. Respect for Privacy

Respect for privacy means that journalists should not interfere unnecessarily in people's private lives. Even public figures have a right to privacy unless their private behavior affects public interest. Journalists should be careful when reporting on personal matters such as family issues, health conditions, or domestic problems.

Journalists must:

a. Avoid exposing private details without strong public interest

Respecting privacy means that journalists should not disclose personal or sensitive information about individuals unless there is a compelling public interest. Public interest refers to information that affects society at large, such as corruption, public safety, or government accountability. Personal details that do not serve the public interest should remain private.

Journalists should:

- Avoid publishing private medical records, family matters, or personal correspondence
- Consider whether revealing the information benefits society or simply satisfies curiosity
- Balance transparency with the rights of individuals

By avoiding unnecessary exposure, journalists prevent harm to individuals and maintain ethical standards.

b. Protect children and victims of crimes

Certain groups, such as children, sexual assault victims, and vulnerable individuals, require extra protection. Publishing their identities, images, or personal stories without consent can cause long-term emotional, social, or legal harm.

Journalists should:

- Use anonymity or pseudonyms when reporting about minors or victims
- Avoid identifying details that could reveal their identity
- Obtain consent from guardians or legal representatives when necessary

Protecting these groups ensures ethical responsibility and prevents re-traumatization.

c. Avoid intrusive photography and hidden recording unless justified

Journalists should respect personal space and private environments. Using hidden cameras, secret recording devices, or photographing people without consent is intrusive and often unethical unless it is necessary to expose wrongdoing or protect the public.

Journalists should:

- Use hidden recordings only when public interest outweighs privacy
- Avoid taking photos in private spaces like hospitals, homes, or private events
- Ensure consent is obtained when possible

This approach preserves dignity while still allowing investigative reporting in exceptional cases.

Importance of respecting privacy

Respecting privacy helps to:

- Protect human dignity and reputation
- Prevent emotional or psychological harm
- Maintain trust between the public and the media
- Ensure ethical compliance and reduce legal risks

Journalists must weigh the need to inform against the potential harm to individuals.

Example

A journalist does not publish photos of accident victims without the consent of their families. This ensures respect for the victims' dignity and prevents further emotional trauma.

6. Avoid Harm

Avoiding harm means that journalists should consider the possible negative effects of their reporting on individuals and society. They should avoid content that may cause violence, hatred, panic, or emotional suffering. Sensationalism—using shocking headlines or images to attract attention—should be avoided.

Journalists should:

a. Avoid graphic images of violence or death

Journalists must be cautious about showing violent or disturbing content, such as images of injuries, blood, or corpses. Graphic visuals can traumatize viewers, especially children or sensitive audiences, and may desensitize the public to violence. Ethical journalism balances informing the public with minimizing psychological harm.

Journalists should:

- Use discretion when selecting images or videos for publication or broadcast
- Blur or avoid graphic content unless it is essential for public awareness
- Include warnings if content could be disturbing

This ensures that the audience receives necessary information without unnecessary distress.

b. Avoid hate speech and inflammatory language

Hate speech includes words, images, or messages that target individuals or groups based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, or political affiliation. Inflammatory language can provoke anger, discrimination, or violence. Journalists must ensure that their reporting does not fuel tension or social division.

Journalists should:

- Use neutral, factual language when reporting conflicts or sensitive issues
- Avoid stereotyping or labeling groups in a derogatory manner

- Refrain from exaggeration that could incite fear or hostility

Responsible reporting helps maintain social harmony and trust in the media.

c. Avoid exposing victims to further trauma

Reporting on victims of accidents, crimes, or disasters must be done with care. Sensationalizing their stories, publishing identifying details, or using invasive images can traumatize them or their families.

Journalists should:

- Seek consent before sharing personal details or images
- Focus on facts without sensationalizing the event
- Offer anonymity to protect the victim's dignity

Ethical reporting ensures that victims are not harmed further by media coverage.

d. Avoid reporting that may incite conflict

Journalists must consider the societal impact of their reporting. News that inflames tensions between communities, political groups, or religious factions can lead to violence or unrest. Ethical journalists weigh the consequences of publication and strive to report responsibly.

Journalists should:

- Avoid exaggerated headlines that provoke fear or anger
- Present context and balanced perspectives
- Verify facts before reporting sensitive events

This helps prevent misunderstandings, panic, and social conflict.

Importance of avoiding harm

Avoiding harm is central to **responsible and humane journalism**. Ethical reporting:

- Protects the mental and emotional well-being of the audience and subjects
- Prevents unnecessary social tension or violence
- Upholds professional integrity and public trust

Journalists have a moral duty to inform the public while minimizing negative consequences.

Example

A journalist does not show graphic images of dead bodies on television. Instead, they report the facts using descriptive words or censored visuals, protecting viewers and respecting the dignity of the victims.

7. Confidentiality

Confidentiality requires journalists to protect the identity of sources who provide sensitive information under a promise of secrecy. Many important stories depend on whistleblowers who fear retaliation. Revealing such identities can endanger lives and discourage future sources from coming forward.

Journalists must:

a. Keep confidential information secure

Confidentiality is a core principle of ethical journalism, especially in investigative reporting. Journalists often receive sensitive information from sources who expect anonymity. Keeping this information secure protects sources from retaliation, harassment, or legal consequences.

Journalists should:

- Store documents, recordings, and communications safely (e.g., encrypted files or secure storage)
- Limit access to confidential materials within the newsroom
- Ensure electronic and physical information is protected from unauthorized disclosure

Secure handling of confidential information builds trusts between journalists and sources.

b. Avoid disclosing names or details that reveal a source's identity

Revealing a source's identity without consent can endanger the individual and discourage others from sharing important information in the future. Journalists must carefully consider what details may indirectly expose a source, such as location, job title, or associations.

Journalists should:

- Use pseudonyms or generic descriptions (e.g., “a government insider” instead of the person's name)
- Avoid including unnecessary details that could identify the source
- Consult legal advice if uncertain about revealing sensitive information

Respecting confidentiality ensures that whistleblowers, witnesses, and vulnerable informants feel safe coming forward.

c. Only break confidentiality under extreme legal or moral necessity

While confidentiality is critical, there may be rare situations where journalists must disclose a source's identity—for example, if there is an imminent threat to life, or if legally compelled by a court order. Even in such cases, journalists should minimize exposure and protect the source as much as possible.

Journalists should:

- Weigh public interest against potential harm
- Inform sources beforehand if disclosure may be unavoidable
- Seek alternative ways to report the story without revealing identities

Breaking confidentiality should always be the **last resort**, used only in exceptional circumstances.

Importance of confidentiality

Confidentiality strengthens investigative journalism by:

- Encouraging sources to provide sensitive and truthful information
- Protecting individuals from retaliation or harm
- Building credibility and trust in the media
- Enabling journalists to expose wrongdoing without endangering themselves or others

Maintaining confidentiality is essential for a free and effective press.

Example

A journalist does not reveal the name of a whistleblower who exposed corruption in a government department. Instead, the report uses a description like “an anonymous government official” to protect the source.

8. Professional Conduct

Professional conduct refers to the behavior and attitude of journalists in their work. Journalists must act in a manner that upholds the dignity of the profession. This includes avoiding corruption, plagiarism, and illegal practices.

Journalists should

a. Avoid bribery, extortion, and corruption

Professional conduct requires journalists to remain honest and transparent in all interactions. Accepting bribes, engaging in extortion, or participating in corrupt practices compromises independence and integrity. Corruption damages public trust and the credibility of both the journalist and the media organization.

Journalists should:

- Refuse money, gifts, or favors in exchange for favorable coverage
- Avoid coercing or intimidating sources for information
- Report news based solely on verified facts, not personal gain

Maintaining integrity ensures that the media is trusted and respected.

b. Avoid copying other people's work without acknowledgment

Plagiarism is unethical and illegal in journalism. Copying another reporter's story, photographs, or research without giving credit undermines professionalism and disrespects the original author. Ethical journalism values originality and proper attribution.

Journalists should:

- Write their own stories or clearly cite sources
- Obtain permission to use copyrighted material when necessary
- Paraphrase or summarize with proper credit

Original reporting strengthens credibility and promotes respect for colleagues' work.

c. Respect copyright laws

Journalists must respect the intellectual property rights of others. Using copyrighted material without authorization is both unethical and illegal. This includes text, photographs, graphics, videos, and audio content.

Journalists should:

- Obtain legal permission before using copyrighted content
- Properly cite and credit all external materials
- Avoid publishing pirated or unlicensed content

Respecting copyright laws ensures ethical compliance and protects media organizations from legal penalties.

d. Follow national laws and professional codes of ethics

Journalists are required to comply with the legal framework and ethical guidelines of their country. Professional codes of ethics guide conduct regarding accuracy, fairness, confidentiality, privacy, and independence. Adherence prevents legal violations and promotes responsible journalism.

Journalists should:

- Be familiar with media laws and regulations
- Follow guidelines set by press councils or journalism associations
- Avoid illegal reporting practices such as defamation, incitement, or invasion of privacy

Compliance with laws and codes protects both journalists and the public.

e. Treat colleagues and sources with respect

Professionalism extends to interpersonal conduct. Journalists should interact respectfully with colleagues, editors, sources, and the audience. Respectful communication encourages cooperation, trust, and ethical information sharing.

Journalists should:

- Avoid harassment, discrimination, or intimidation
- Acknowledge contributions from colleagues
- Maintain courteous and professional relationships with sources

Mutual respect strengthens the credibility and effectiveness of journalism as a profession.

Importance of professional conduct

Professional conduct ensures that journalism remains **respected, credible, and ethical**. By adhering to these standards, journalists:

- Uphold the integrity of the media
- Maintain public trust
- Promote fair and lawful reporting
- Foster a professional work environment

Example

A journalist writes their own original story instead of copying another reporter's work. This demonstrates honesty, originality, and respect for colleagues' contributions.